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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 001803

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [ENRG](#) [PTER](#) [MNUC](#) [IR](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: PRC/IRAN: SCHOLAR ON ELECTION'S TIANANMEN ECHOES,  
IMPLICATIONS FOR NUCLEAR ISSUE

Classified By: Acting Political Section Chief Ben Moeling.  
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to a senior Chinese academic, Beijing was handling coverage of the contested Iranian elections carefully in light of potential comparisons by ordinary Chinese of the unrest to the leadership split that lead to the June 4 Tiananmen massacre. Our contact said that Beijing's top priority remained fostering U.S.-Iran communication to resolve the nuclear issue, and the election turmoil had not led to any significant change in Beijing's views on that issue. China sought to understand what the United States would be willing to offer to strike a deal with Tehran over the nuclear issue, according to the scholar. He reported that Beijing-based Iranian EmbOffs indicated that "major policy changes" were likely once the election turmoil dissipated, suggesting a new willingness to enter into dialogue with the United States. A separate academic contact said that the media coverage served to reinforce the message that "color revolutions" instigated by western governments and NGOs were a danger to rising powers in the developing world. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In a June 26 conversation, Li Guofu (protect), Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the MFA-affiliated China Institute for International Studies (CIIS), provided PolOff with his perspective on the election turmoil in Iran. Li is a well-known academic with close ties to the Foreign Ministry and the State Council, as well as a frequent commentator on Middle East issues in the Chinese media.

Tiananmen Echoes Lead Beijing to Restrict Coverage  
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¶3. (C) Li said that the Chinese leadership was viewing the current election violence in Tehran, and the way it was received by the Chinese population, in part through the prism of the Tiananmen incident. He noted the uncomfortable parallels between the two, particularly the way in which a split among top leadership personalities -- Deng-Zhao in China and Khamenei-Rafsanjani in Iran -- had played out in the streets as a violent clash between police and protestors. He noted that the issue had been downplayed in the Chinese media once Tehran's response to the protests turned violent, to avoid accusations of interference by the Iranians as well as comparisons to China's internal situation, especially with the 20th anniversary this year of the Tiananmen massacre. Li said that he had not faced specific restrictions on his media appearances during the election turmoil, but noted that few editorials or opinion pieces had been run in China's state-controlled media out of concern that over-emphasis of the Iranian election violence might recall for ordinary Chinese the June 4 events.

Reactions in Chinese Society to Election Violence  
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14. (C) Li opined that ordinary Chinese citizens following the Iranian election were likely to believe the claims of fraud, but were also likely to believe Tehran's claims that western countries, including the United States, had interfered in Iran by providing covert support to the rioters. He said that most Chinese hoped for calm but noted that, to Chinese citizens, such election turmoil seemed "normal" for the emergent democratic societies in the Middle East region.

Fears of "Color Revolution" Instigated by Western Powers  
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15. (C) Associate Dean of the School of International Relations at Renmin University Zhang Xiaojin (protect) agreed in a separate meeting that the Chinese leadership was clearly concerned about how the election turmoil would be viewed by the Chinese people. He said that reporting in the Chinese press in the first few days after the election focused on the message that the democratic process leads to social instability and chaos, and, reflecting PRC leadership concerns, this coverage had soon shifted gears to portraying the situation in Iran as another potential "color revolution" that was supported by western governments and foreign NGOs with the goal of destabilizing and weakening a rising power. He noted that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, fears of a "color revolution" still weighed heavily on the CCP, as reflected in the coverage of the Iran election aftermath. Zhang added that the broader Chinese public had a poor understanding of the social and historical conditions in Iran that led to the violence.

Direct U.S.-Iran Talks Still a Priority for China

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16. (C) Turning to China's perspective on Iran's nuclear program, CIIS' Li said that Beijing's top priority was fostering U.S.-Iran communication to resolve the issue. He said that Beijing sought to know possible U.S. enticements to Iran to make a deal on the nuclear issue and whether U.S. negotiations with Iran on its nuclear program would address Iranian support for groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. He said that Beijing understood that President Obama had invested political capital into opening a dialogue with Iran and thus needed to demonstrate progress. He opined that progress on the IAEA's Additional Protocol could help the Obama administration show results on the nuclear issue while remaining acceptable to the Iranians as long as the Additional Protocol was presented in the context of strengthening the NPT, rather than a measure targeting Iran only.

Election Turmoil Does Not Change PRC View of Nuclear Issue  
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17. (C) Li stressed that the election turmoil in Iran had not led to any significant change in Beijing's views on the nuclear issue nor on the need for engagement with Iran to resolve it. He acknowledged that the present situation clearly made progress less likely in the short-term, but he insisted that there was still room for progress on the nuclear issue "once the air clears." He added that the election result would in the long-run be positive for progress on the nuclear issue given that Ahmadinejad, as a hard-liner, was more capable of reaching a breakthrough with the United States than the reformist camp.

"Major Changes" Down the Road from the Iranian Side?  
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18. (C) In recent meetings with Iranian Embassies based in Beijing, Li said he was told that they expected "major policy changes" from Tehran once the furor over the contested election settled, which, Li suggested, indicated a new willingness to engage in talks with the United States. His

interlocutors claimed that Ahmadinejad was ready to negotiate, but with preconditions, and they expected to see a positive gesture from him in the coming months. Li said that he responded by encouraging the Iranians to engage in dialogue with the United States and noting that China was willing to facilitate engagement. Li stated that despite the harsh tone of official statements coming out of Iran, many in Tehran took note of President Obama's nuanced approach to the election violence. He added that the Iranians had expected strong words from President Obama from the beginning and noted that he turned up the rhetoric only after the outbreak of violence.

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